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289986 Reporting of weapon carrying at school among US youth: Personal attitudes and perceptions of peers' attitudes

Monday, November 4, 2013 : 9:06 AM - 9:24 AM

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Adolescent weapon carrying is a significant school and public health concern. Previous research shows that students' perceptions of school climate predict willingness to report threats of violence. Given that adolescents often act and think according to their perceptions of peer norms, perceptions of peer attitudes regarding reporting of weapon carrying (RWC) may predict personal willingness to report peers who carry weapons. However, perceptions of peer attitudinal norms regarding RWC may be quite inaccurate and may be more influential than actual norms. To assess the accuracy of perceived peer norms regarding RWC to several different types of school personnel and community authorities, anonymous online surveys were conducted among youth in 50 middle and high schools (grades 5 to 12) in 6 states reflecting diverse regional settings (n= 35,457) between 2006 and 2012. The survey reveals personal attitudes about reporting, aggregate attitudes at each school, and perceived norms about same-school peers regarding RWC attitudes. Analyses show that pro-reporting attitudes of peers are substantially underestimated. The most common (and erroneous) perception is that the majority of students do not believe students would report weapon carrying even though most students personally think students should to some school or community authority. Multilevel analysis reveals that perceptions of RWC attitudes are highly predictive of personal attitudes—more so than actual school norms and demographic factors. Thus pervasive misperceptions may contribute to bystander apathy about peers with weapons. To support RWC, practitioners should consider promoting actual norms about RWC attitudes in their schools to help reduce misperceptions.

Learning Areas:Public health or related research
Social and behavioral sciences**Learning Objectives:**

Describe students' personal attitudes towards reporting of weapon carrying in school environments. Describe perception of peers' attitudes towards reporting of weapon carrying in school environments. Describe misperception patterns of peers' attitudes. Describe how accuracy of attitudinal norm perception regarding reporting of weapon carrying is related to personal attitude. Discuss why looking at perception of peers' attitudes is important.

Keywords: Violence Prevention, Students**Presenting author's disclosure statement:**

Qualified on the content I am responsible for because: I am co-investigator on the Youth, Health, and Safety Project and the Alcohol Education Project through which I have had several peer-reviewed publications over the past several years. All papers have

addressed adolescent school environments, social norms, and perceptions regarding bullying, violence, and weight issues. I also have been a researcher on federally funded grants focusing on social networks, social norms and health.

Any relevant financial relationships? No

I agree to comply with the American Public Health Association Conflict of Interest and Commercial Support Guidelines, and to disclose to the participants any off-label or experimental uses of a commercial product or service discussed in my presentation.

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